

Testimony in support of HB3087

March 23, 2017

Chair Lively and the members of the House Early Childhood and Family Supports Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony support of HB3087. My name is Anna Stiefvater, I live in NE Portland and I'm a native Oregonian. I've spent 20 years working as a public health nurse to improve the health of mothers, infants and families. As you may be aware, very few Oregon workers have access to paid family leave from work and many Oregon workers cannot afford to take unpaid leave. This almost certainly ensures that parents are making the tough choice to return to work when their infants are just days or weeks old. We know from neuroscience research that the early experiences of infants affect the development of brain architecture, which provides the foundation for all future learning, behavior, and health. I believe that a comprehensive paid leave policy that allow families the time they need to care for their infants at a critical time of development is among the most important ways we can improve maternal and child health in Oregon.

The time around childbirth is a vulnerable time for families; there is so much happening as the newborns' brain develops, breastfeeding is initiated, mothers are working to heal physically and emotionally; and patterns of attachment and bonding that have lifelong impacts begin. Research indicates that when parents have more time at home with their children, their families are healthier. Newborns are more likely to be taken for regular well-child care and immunizations and are more likely to be breastfed. Fathers are more likely to be involved in the direct care of their children and paid leave policies have been associated with fewer infant deaths. We know that nationally and in Oregon, families that are most likely to need paid leave are the least likely to access it. This type of inequity piles up for vulnerable families and is among the root cause for the many health disparities faced by low-income families.

Healthy communities are created through the implementation of health conscious policies, such as paid family leave. As a public health nurse, I've spent my career working with at-risk mothers and children in Oregon. I've worked in clinical settings, I've done home visiting providing education and case management to very vulnerable families and I've worked at the community and systems level to improve health care practices and expand access to care. Unfortunately, if our state doesn't support healthy early experiences and attachment for infants through policies such as paid family leave, many of the families I work with will not have a fair chance at good health. I urge you to help empower working Oregonians and their families to be healthier by supporting HB3087.

Thank you for your time.

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